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## Water Powered Mill on Bull Creek

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Before electricity, flowing water was a prime source of energy to run mills for sawing lumber and grinding grains. The Mormons are credited with construction, in 1846, of one of Travis County's first mills on Bull Creek. That mill was created after the one at the base of Mount Bonnell on the Colorado River washed away.

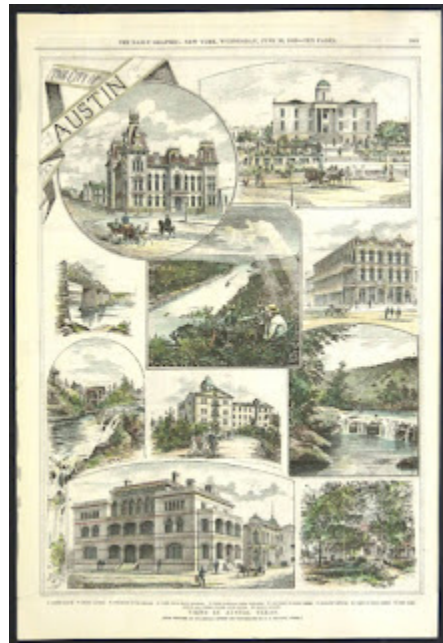
The Mormons were not the only ones to build mills on Bull Creek. The one shown here was likely built ca. 1850s by Hughell Walden, one of the early settlers to the Bull Creek Valley. This photograph was taken by H.B. Hillyer, Austin based photographer, variously dated at ca. 1869 or 1875.



Historic Edward Zimmerman house

Clementine Walden Jackson, granddaughter of Hughell Walden, says this mill was used as a lumber mill, shingle mill, and also for grinding corn. The home of Edward Zimmerman, built in 1861, now on the property of The Settlement Home for Children, is said to have been built with lumber from a mill on Bull Creek, quite

possibly this one. Another historic home, Martin Wieland's "Fortress Home" (a blockhouse), in what was then Dessau, Texas, was built in the 1850s and is said to have used large cedar beams cut from trees on Bull Creek. Those beams, too, may well have been milled at Walden's mill.



Views in Austin from 1880  
featured the old mill as one of  
the sites to be seen in Austin

## Wagon Ruts on Bull Creek

Downstream from the mill, inside Bull Creek District Park, 6701 Lakewood Dr, are wagon ruts, remnants in good part from ox drawn wagon traffic to and from the mill. Clementine Walden describes one of her visits to the old wagon ruts (p.41):

"Today ... I went out to Bull Creek. I wanted to go down on what we always called the flat bottom where you can still see the deep wagon ruts cut into the solid rock bottom cut in there by the first Walden family, first by our Grandfather Hughill (sic) Walden with an ox wagon, then by his three sons: Junes, William, and my father, John Walden."

We know these ruts in the park are the ones she is describing by her reference to what she called the "Mabry dam" just upstream (p.42). The dam was created by Gen. W.H. Mabry (as in Camp Mabry) ca. 1892, the year he signed a lease agreement with John Walden's widow, Rachel, to lease her land to impound water from his dam.

Other families living in the valley of Bull Creek likely also helped in the creation of these ruts as they came and went from their homesteads. If you measure the ruts, they are consistent width of about 4'8", a standard

width often cited for wagons and railroad gauges. Other ruts appear up and down the rock bottoms of Bull Creek, but these in the park are among the most visible, comparable to the prominent ruts near the Chisholm Trail crossing of Brushy Creek in Round Rock (literally at the “round rock” that marks that crossing).



Bob Ward with the Travis County Historical Commission measures width of ruts. As illustrated here, matching ruts are not those adjacent to one another (notice his ruler). The ruts closest together were different tracks.





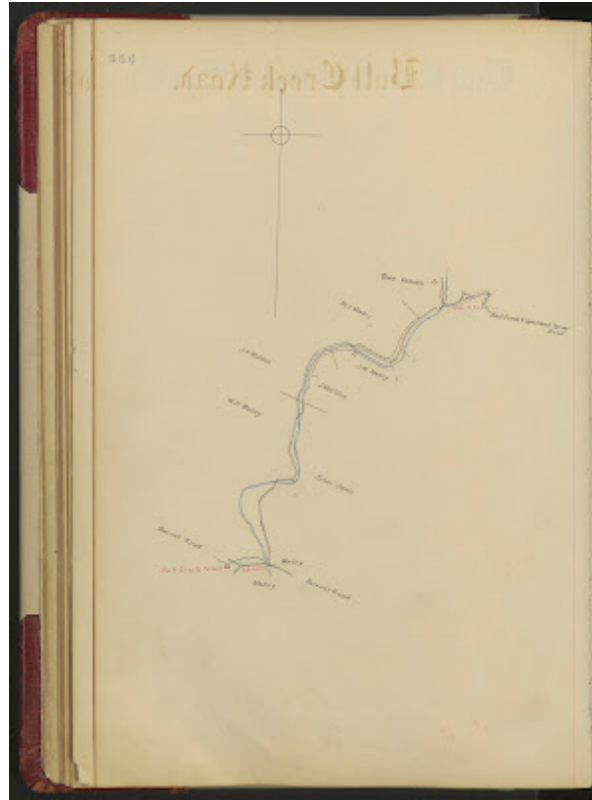
Other tracks appear along Bull Creek. These close to the intersection of Loop 360 and Lakewood Drive unfortunately appear to have been disturbed by Loop 360 construction, or by the sewer system work that was done in Bull Creek.



Wagon ruts in Round Rock



Dam created by Gen. W.H. Mabry. Lease agreement with widow of John Walden (son of Hughell Walden) signed in 1892 allowed the dam to impound water on Walden property. By 1892 the mill was out of use. Did wagon traffic come this far up the creek?



Travis County road maps of 1898-1902  
show Mabry and Walden properties along  
Bull Creek

## References

Barkley, Mary Starr (1963). *History of Travis County and Austin, 1839-1899*. Waco, TX: Texian Press.

Fortress Home, historical marker and marker application form

<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=146852>

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph491598/>

Hillyer, Hamilton Briscoe (1835-1903). Photo titled "The old Mill in Bull Creek". Date of photo is ca. 1875. However William J. Hill *Texas Artisans and Artists Archive*, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, cites a date of ca. 1869. This image was purchased from Lawrence T. Jones III *Texas Photographs by Richard Denney*. DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University. <http://digitalcollections.smu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/jtx/id/686>. Hillyer was a famous early photographer of Texas and opened a gallery on Pecan Street (now Sixth Street) in Austin in 1867 or 1868

Jackson, Clementine (Walden). *The Walden home in the valley*. 1966, Austin, Texas. Copy available in Austin History Center. A history of Bull Creek and the Walden family, early settlers there. See also related newspaper article: "Good Days on Bull Creek", *The American-Statesman*, Sunday, April 28, 1963. Memories of Mrs. Clementine Walden Jackson marking the close of an era in the Bull Creek Valley. Also: "She Recalls Bull Creek, Oak Grove of Long Ago!". *The American-Statesman*, Sunday, August 14, 1966.

Views in Austin, Texas. The Daily Graphic, Wednesday, June 30, 1880. Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin. The page features 10 printed sketches of various scenes touting Austin. Of the 10, two are from Bull Creek, illustrating the romance associated with Bull Creek from Austin's founding. <http://texasartisans.mfah.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15939coll6/id/1295>

Travis County Clerk Records: Road Book Precinct 2 Page: 356. County road books of 1898-1902 show Walden and Mabry land holdings along Bull Creek 1898-1902. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht713044/m1/124/?q=Travis%20County%20Clerk%20Records%20Road%20Book%20Precinct>

Travis County Deed Records Deed Record 104, Page 392. Documents Gen. W.H. Mabry leasing land from Rachel Walden, widow of John Walden, to allow impounding of water from Mabry's dam onto Walden property. Dated June 13, 1892. The lease was for 10 years but Gen. Mabry died in 1899 in Cuba in the Spanish-American War. The Portal to Texas History, crediting Travis County Clerk's Office. Thanks to TCHC associate member Lanny Ottosen for helping with the deed research. Retrieved March 15, 2020 <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht834335/m1/398/?q=Record%20104>